

House Bill 172  
January 13, 2011  
Presented by Dave Risley  
House Fish, Wildlife and Parks Committee

Mr. Chairman and committee members, I am Dave Risley, Wildlife Division Administrator of Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP). I am here to provide information about House Bill 172.

HB172 directs FWP to establish hunting season quotas for grizzly bears that will prevent populations of deer, elk, and antelope from decreasing beyond sustainable levels pursuant to 87-1-323. FWP feels this is direction to manage at or above population objectives. 87-1-323 directs FWP to manage big game populations at or below population objectives. We recommend the sponsor reconcile these apparent differences prior to advancing any legislation.

FWP has been managing grizzly bears with the intent of recovering and delisting them as soon as possible. Our concern with HB172 is that this bill will likely be used by groups who oppose grizzly bear delisting to make a case that Montana will no longer abide by the tri-state conservation strategy in the GYE, and that grizzly bear management will be secondary to management of big game animals in both the GYE and NCDE. This will make it difficult to achieve and legally sustain delisting of grizzly bears in either the GYE or NCDE. This is a reference to the "adequate regulatory" fault the judicial system has indentified in Wyoming wolf management. Grizzly bears have significantly less reproductive capacity and as such must be managed differently than other large carnivores.

FWP already attempts to comply with the intent of this bill which is to manage big game populations at objective per 87-1-323, taking into account multiple variables, including weather, predation, game damage, and previous year's harvest. In the GYE and NCDE, grizzly bears are but one variable that is considered, along with predation impacts from wolves, mountain lions, and coyotes. FWP also already manages grizzly bears, although under the umbrella of the ESA, to reduce livestock conflicts and deal aggressively with human safety issues as directed per 87-1-217.